



Illinois Department of Financial and
Professional Regulation
Bryan Schneider, Secretary

NEWS

For Immediate Release
October 14, 2015

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State Regulators Warn Halloween Colored Contacts Could Permanently Damage Your Eyes

CHICAGO — With the Halloween season upon us, the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR) is reminding the public that purchasing colored contact lenses from anyone other than a licensed eye care professional or pharmacist is dangerous. In recent years, illegally-purchased colored contacts have flooded the retail market during Halloween and are most often found at malls, beauty supply stores and via online websites. These lenses are often made overseas in non-FDA approved facilities with tinting materials that may be toxic to the eye. Without a proper examination and fitting, colored contacts can cause damage to the eye, including blindness.

"The use of decorative contacts to alter the appearance or color of the eyes has been a growing trend over the past several years," said Bryan Schneider, IDFPR Secretary. "Because children and adults alike view colored contacts as a fashion or costume accessory, they neglect to realize that these lenses are classified as medical devices that pose the same potential safety and health issues as corrective lenses. As regulators, it is important that we alert consumers to the unnecessary dangers of infection from over-the-counter colored contacts made from potentially unsafe materials."

IDFPR licenses an estimated 2,300 optometrists and hundreds of ophthalmologists in Illinois. Many have reported seeing patients who have suffered from infections or corneal scratches as a result of contact lens problems. Because contact lenses sit directly on the cornea and could potentially limit the amount of oxygen reaching the eye, all contact lenses pose some risk to wearers. By requiring lenses to be fitted and sold by professionals, that risk is limited and managed.

In addition to scratches from ill fitting lenses, bacteria build within the eye very rapidly and can cause infections. Some types of bacteria can cause permanent scarring within twenty hours of the outbreak, if left untreated. While the infection may look like *pinkeye*, an easily treated eye infection, contact lenses can cause eye ulcers which must be treated with strong antibiotic medicine. If left untreated, ulcers can cause partial or total irreversible blindness.

"Last year, a 20 year old patient presented with complaints of significant pain, discharge, light sensitivity and decreased vision," said Dr. Jennifer S. Harthan, Chief of the Cornea Center at Illinois College of Optometry. "Her symptoms began after sleeping in colored contact lenses that she purchased from a beauty supply store. She later admitted that she did not know how to clean her lenses and that she was unaware that she could not sleep in her contact lenses. The patient ended up having a severe pseudomonas corneal ulcer. She now has permanent vision loss."

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Because the health risk is serious and most of the customers seeking cosmetic contact lenses are teens and young adults, IDFPR is partnering with the Illinois State Board of Education and the Department of Public Health to alert teachers, administrators and health care professionals in every school district and county in the state about the serious health and vision problems facing young people and warning signs to look for in their students and patients.

Sales of contact lenses to consumers without a valid prescription are considered the unlicensed practice of optometry and subject to cease and desist orders and civil fines of up to \$10,000. Illinois residents are encouraged to notify state officials if they see lenses for sale at retail outlets that do not require a prescription from a licensed eye-care professional. Consumers can file complaints at www.idfpr.com or by calling our consumer hotline number at 1-888-4REGUL8 (1-888-473-4858).

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